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Teasing for Tips

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Teasing For Tips

Inside the daily grind of a bikini bar dancer

BY JADEN URBI DESIGN NAILAH FITZGERALD PHOTO JESSICA DARLAND

*stage name

While many college kids are scrounging for their last few dollars as they stumble into Jeff's Pizza on their way home from the bars, a few students are cashing in and heading home after a long night at the club.

Facing a church just a few steps past Main Street sits an unsuspecting venue in a row of brick buildings, but inside the solid black doors, just past the oldschool arcade game machine, lies a laid back hole-in-the-wall club with a fully stocked bar, rounds of tables and chairs and a stage complete with a shiny pole to tie the whole gentleman's club together.

On a mid-October Monday night around 5 p.m., low-key party music flowed throughout the club at a surprisingly comfortable volume, and three men sat in extra large, and very comfy black leather chairs at the dimly lit bar. They were laughing and sharing stories with the bartender, Alex*, as if they were longtime friends.

Alex was introduced to Dangerous Curves nine years ago through friends who worked there at the time. "I was a student and I had to pay the bills, I tried dancing and made all the money I needed to make in that one night," she says.

Alex danced for a couple years until she was asked if she wanted to start bartending. She graduated from ISU with a degree in agricultural education and has spent the past seven years bartending and managing the club on and off.

"I still have that degree to fall back on, but I'm honestly making more now than I would teaching—for now this is just easy money," Alex says.

While it is located in a town dominated by college students, students are not the club's key demographic.

"Let's be real, college students don't have money to throw around, the older men do; and that's who we see coming into the club more often," Alex says. "We do get the occasional college guys come in on their birthday or the bachelor party, and those are fun and we cater to that, but the majority of guests we see are middleaged working men."

She says Dangerous Curves sees a rush of guests on weekends, especially gamedays, and then again in the summer around construction projects and various conferences.

"We get repeat customers from yearly firemen and agriculture conferences that come through in the summer, guys who would rather come hang out in the club and meet people here than sit in their hotel room," Alex says.

Different from other gentleman's clubs, Dangerous Curves is a bikini bar, meaning the girls don't get naked—they always have on at least a bra and underwear, and if someone wears a see-through bra they have to wear nipple pasties or another bra underneath.

"It's so much more laid back here," Alex says. "The girls can go sit at a table and have a drink with the customers and talk with them before they get up and do a dance. It's low pressure compared to a lot of clubs where girls are expected to be on their feet giving dances all night."

About three-quarters of the girls who come in looking for work are students, and the rest are either girls from Des Moines or local areas that have danced at other clubs before.

"We get undergrads, grad students and doctoral students come in wanting a job—I've had 'em all," Alex says.

Students usually work when they can fit it in their schedules, staying on average about six months, Alex says, but she's had some girls stay four years.

When it comes to hiring, Alex isn't judging the girls on their looks. She evaluates the girls on how friendly they are, their personality, their ability to talk to strangers and if they seem to be low drama.

"I hire a broad spectrum of girls of all different backgrounds, sexual orientation, shapes and sizes," Alex says. "There's no denying it, some guys like curvy women and some guys like thin women, we have someone here to please everyone."



Robyn* performs her dance on stage at Dangerous Curves



AN UNEXPECTED JOURNEY TO THE STAGE

While some students start planning for their afternoon nap at the blaring noise of their alarm for an 8 a.m., Jade* gets up for the day knowing she probably won't get back until 2 or 3 in the morning.

Somewhere between classes in Gerdin, playing tennis, solving sudoku puzzles, cramming for finance exams and going out with her friends, Jade finds time to transition from her life as a college student into a temptress by night.

As if walking into her own apartment after a long day, Jade is the first dancer to roll into the club around 5:30 p.m., looking as any other ordinary college student and exclaimed "people need to learn how to fucking drive" to Alex, as she headed to the back to change.

Returning in a pink seethrough babydoll top and white panties, Jade let out a sigh of exhaustion and greeted me at the bar in clear platform sandals.

Two years ago, as a sophomore at Iowa State, Jade nervously walked through those same doors she so comfortably flew by today. A friend who worked there told her about a job at a bikini bar.

"I walked in thinking I was applying for a waitressing job where I would wear a bikini or something—then I saw the pole," Jade says. "Oh my God, I was so nervous. I was like any other girl thinking dancing on a pole was ratchet. I never in a million years saw myself doing this."

Instead of turning around and running out of the club, she went through with the application process. Now a senior in business, she's spent the last two years learning how to hustle men for their money.

"Once I walk in those doors, I am no longer who I am outside of this place, I am a fantasy," she says.

FOR THE LOVE OF THE SPOTLIGHT

While Jade never imagined herself dancing on a stage, Roselie*, another dancer at the club, said she's thought about getting involved in the business before.

"I've definitely considered it before. I've heard of the Lumberyard and those places but when I found out there's a bikini bar here in Ames I thought that was perfect," Roselie said.

Roselie used to attend Iowa State, but transferred to PCI Academy to follow her passion for hair and makeup. Not only is she a student, but she also spends time with her one year-old son and fiancé.

During classes one day, a friend of Roselie's from PCI was talking about a job she had at Dangerous Curves and Roselie asked if she could check it out.

Her friend talked with one of the managers and was able to bring Roselie in one night.

A little nervous, Roselie came into the club with her friend for the first time a few months ago and ended up working her first night as a dancer.

"I walked in and they told me to go on back and get ready, then my friend showed me a couple tricks before the club opened and I danced my first three songs," Roselie said.

Roselie said her friend, who worked there at the time, has been the biggest help in teaching her how to succeed as a dancer.

"Her first night, my friend just got up on stage and shook her butt for all three songs—she made sure I didn't make a fool of myself like that," she laughs.

Roselie said the rush of that "all eyes on me" moment was an exhilarating feeling, especially her first night.

"People kept asking me who I was and if I was new here, it was just such a confidence boost to be on stage and know everyone was interested in me," she says.

A TYPICAL NIGHT

Jade typically comes into work a couple nights a week around 5 or 6 p.m. and heads to the back to get dressed for the night.

"I usually spend a lot more time getting ready on the weekends, the guys that come in during the week probably don't care what my face looks like," laughs Jade.

She used to come in super early and stay until close, but the dancers aren't allowed to leave once they get here, and that can turn into an 11-hour shift.

"I've gotten more comfortable with the club and now I pretty much just come in whenever I want," Jade says.

Since she is technically self-employed at the club, she holds another job to pay taxes and make sure the government doesn't see her as unemployed.

Jade says she has a love-hate relationship with the job. The hours are terrible, but the job itself isn't so bad and she laughed at the thought of even comparing the pay between her two jobs.

Roselie is only working at Dangerous Curves for now, and she hopes to work at a salon in Iowa City after she graduates, but there will be some major differences in her work days to come.

"Here at the club, I'm able to deal with negative customers a little more directly," she says. "If someone is rude to me, I can tell them I hope they get rid of their negativity and just walk away. But at a salon, if a customer is rude to me I have to smile and stay professional. You can't just walk away from a salon chair."

Jade starts the night sitting at the bar with a Corona and lime, making small talk with one of the guests, a middle-aged man, as a few more start to trickle in around 5:45.

Throughout the night, she's scheduled to do three dances on the stage. Between those, she will mingle with guests at the bar and tables, and hustle by giving personal dances in the back.

"It's not like a lot of other clubs where the guys can do whatever they want with you," Jade says.

"If you don't want a guy touching you, you can tell them to stop and the bartenders are always watching and they'll back you up 100 percent."

There are cameras in the back room for private dances so someone can always be keeping an eye on what's going on and making sure the girls aren't being forced to do anything they're uncomfortable with.

That being said, the girls at the club still have their fair share of weird experiences.

"God," Jade sighs. "One guy kept asking me to finger my asshole for extra money."

Another guest who regularly comes in has a jean fetish, she says.

"This guy always wants me to re-enact the slime scene from that old Nickelodeon show, so I'll literally stand in the back for at least four songs, and that's like \$20 each, and just act like I just got slimed on Nickelodeon," Jade says. "I'm literally getting paid to give lap dances in my jeans and pretend that I'm getting slimed."

Jade says her nightly pay always fluctuates, one night she'll bring home more on a weekend than a weekday, but she might bring home more on a Monday night than on the weekend.

"I don't think I've ever left with less than \$100 in a night, but I've definitely made up to about \$900 in a single night," she says.

KEEPING A SECRET

Being a college town, the fear of running into someone you know from some unpleasant circumstance is nearly inevitable, whether it be a regret-filled hookup or that time you threw up on their couch at a house party.

For Jade, it's a nightly worry to wonder if someone from one of her classes is going to walk into the club and see her half-naked on stage.

"One time this guy came in that I knew from my freshman year in Helser, and he kept saying he knew me and I kept insisting he didn't. It was pretty awkward but I eventually gave in and begged him to keep it a secret that I worked here," she says.

While a small group of her friends and family know about her job at Dangerous Curves, she is very selective about who she tells, in order to keep her work life private.

"My mom doesn't know, but I told my sister and she was appalled," Jade says. "She and the friends I told were shocked at first, but they knew me before I started dancing so they can't judge me on just that. They're OK with me doing it as long as I'm being smart, and I am."

Roselie's friends know about her job, but she says her family definitely does not know.

"Whenever they ask what I'm doing for work, I just tell them I'm bartending," Roselie says.

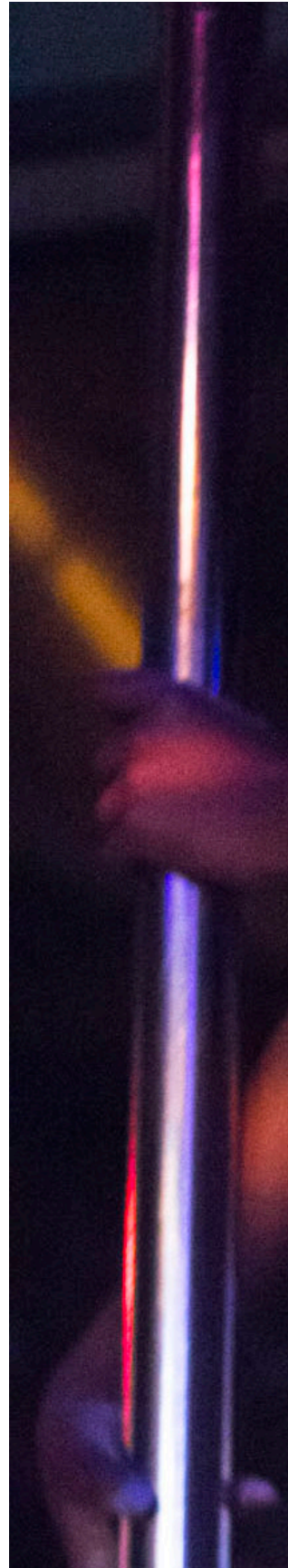
Some days it gets hard to manage being a mom, going to school and working, but she's staying positive. She says this job has actually given her a huge confidence boost—not to mention that her arms are in the best shape they've been since high school.

Since working at Dangerous Curves, Jade says she has learned a lot, especially about men and their intentions. The job has also caused her to become much more confident in herself.

"Before this, I would even try to cover up my body when I would go to the pool in a two-piece or something, I've really become more comfortable with myself and gotten rid of a lot of my self-consciousness," Jade says.

She says she does feel like she is judged quickly by her job, and while some nights are worse than others, but she wants people to understand that it's really not a bad job.

"We're up here dancing in our underwear and having conversations with guys throughout the night, but I've gone out to bars and seen girls doing much sluttier things that we're doing over here," Jade says. "It's more than just what people think." ■





Dangerous Curves is a bikini bar, meaning that dancers remain partially clothed throughout the night